

Russia/arms control

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Subject: Russia/arms control

RC: I think your idea of establishing a Biden-Putin Commission -- like Gore-Chernomyrdin - to coordinate and drive the US-Russian relationship has a lot of merit. It elevates the relationship after eight years of neglect which has fueled nationalistic resentment in Moscow and provides a mechanism for achieving trade-offs that can produce a larger bargain.

As you think about such an arrangement, I would urge you to establish clearly at the outset that strategic arms control is a Secretarial issue.

I believe achieving historic arms reductions, articulated in terms of the goal JFK set out at American University in 1963 -- moving toward disarmament -- should be one of your signature issues. Of course, any issue becomes a Presidential issue in the end, but you can set the table. It will require the combination of vision and discipline which you uniquely can bring to bear. The issue is ripe. START expires in 2009. The disastrous economic circumstances facing the Russians, in my judgment, will make them more ready to engage seriously.

The architecture of a Biden-Putin Commission should be designed so that either arms control is not within its mandate or it falls within it with you in the lead.

I'd be happy to discuss this with you further.

Sandy

This is written from my Blackberry.